

history. As the very next chapter of Joshua makes clear, in the account of narrowly avoided civil war at the end of the Joshua era, the point of view represented by the redactor's use of the levitical cities list is anything but utopian.

Now that the land has been fairly allotted, with institutions in place for combatting private vengeance and for the promulgation of Yahwist ethic, how will the Bene Israel conduct themselves as citizens of the Yahweh-kingdom? With the record filled out to the satisfaction of the final redactor, transition to the following era is effected in a characteristic way, by adding the tragicomic story in chap. 22. At the end of the succeeding book there are two such chapters (Judges 19–20 and 21).²³ But first comes a summary at the end of Joshua 21 emphasizing the quality of Yahweh's faithfulness to his promise and oath: "Not a word of all the Good Word which Yahweh had spoken to the house of Israel proved untrue. It all happened" (Josh 21:45).

²³ Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (AB 6A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975) 271–88 and 289–94.

SARGON AND JOSEPH: DREAMS COME TRUE¹

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THE recently published Sumerian account of Sargon of Akkad's rise to power² tells us that his ascendancy was foretold to him in a dream. At the time, Sargon was serving as cupbearer to king Urzababa of Kish,³ and the latter, not unsurprisingly, was extremely displeased to learn of Sargon's dream, and went to great lengths to avoid the consequences that it prophesied. But even before Sargon had his dream, Urzababa himself had nocturnal premonitions of his downfall, to which he reacted in the same way that Naramsin reacted to a dream foretelling his own doom in *The Curse of Agade*:⁴ "He understood, but would not articulate it, nor speak about it with anyone" (line 4). If Urzababa's uneasiness at this point cannot simply be ascribed to a bad manuscript tradition (there is only one manuscript preserved, and the line occurs again later in the composition at a more appropriate place), then we ought to assume either an earlier prophetic dream of Sargon or some other ominous event in the lost part of the composition that preceded the beginning of the new text. In any case, a week or so after these first premonitions, Urzababa had a genuine conniption ("Like a lion, he was dribbling urine, filled with blood and pus, down his legs, / He struggled like a floundering salt-water fish, he was terrified there"; lines 10f.), and only then did Sargon "lay down not to sleep, but lay down to dream" (line 13).

The dream itself is first presented in the narrative in a brief and intentionally ambiguous form: "Holy Inana, in the dream, was drowning him (Urzababa) in a river of blood" (line 14). That Urzababa (and

¹ I would like to thank A. Kort for her assistance with the research for this paper.

² J. Cooper and W. Heimpel, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 67ff.

³ For the literary traditions surrounding Sargon's career, see B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend*, ASOR Dissertation Series, (Cambridge: ASOR, 1980).

⁴ See J. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1983), lines 87 and 93a.

not Sargon) is the antecedent of "him" is clear from what follows, and certainly must have been clear to Sargon himself; only the reader/auditor is temporarily left in suspense. The reader is even led toward concluding, incorrectly, that Sargon is the antecedent by the reaction of Sargon in the next line: "Sargon, screaming, gnawed the ground." The true interpretation is revealed when Urzababa, having heard Sargon's screams, summoned Sargon and asked him to recount his dream. Sargon's reply consists of a more elaborate and more specific account of the dream:

"Oh my king, this is my dream which I will have told you about:
 "There was a single young woman, she was high as the heavens, she was broad as the earth,
 "She was firmly set as the base of a wall.
 "For me, she drowned you in a great [river], a river of blood." (lines 21-24)

Here there is no ambiguity, nor is there any possibility that Sargon's perception is incorrect: Urzababa's earlier premonitions and the course of action he is about to take, the role of Inana in Sargon's career, and that career itself, as known from both historical and literary-historical sources, leave no doubt that according to the dream it is Urzababa, not Sargon, who will perish. Sargon's screams could not have been caused by the ultimate outcome foretold by the dream, which was in his favor. Rather, it was the prospect of supplanting a master whom he perhaps loved, and the possible consequences when Urzababa would learn of his coming demise, that so unnerved Sargon.

Sargon had reason to worry. Urzababa reacted to Sargon's dream with apprehension (line 25), but then turned to his chancellor and provided the dream with a new interpretation:

"[] my royal sister, holy Inana,
 "[] is going to put my finger into a . . . of blood,
 "[The]n she will drown Sargon, the cupbearer(?), in a great river."
 (lines 27-29)

Knowing in his heart that Sargon had correctly reported and understood the dream, Urzababa publicly proclaimed his own bravado interpretation, which predicted the demise of Sargon instead of himself. And he set in motion a vain plot to turn his new interpretation into reality. The details of this plot form the least intelligible part of a generally difficult text, but Inana protects Sargon and he returns unscathed to Urzababa's palace, much to the latter's horror.

Sargon's dream of replacing his master and ruler is reminiscent of the dreams of Joseph in Genesis 37. Before the dreams are recounted, we are told that as his father's favorite, Joseph was unpopular with his elder brothers, information that foreshadows both the mistreatment of Joseph

by his brothers, and his eventual ascendance over them. The slightly sinister mood this casts at the tale's beginning can be compared with the atmosphere of foreboding created by Urzababa's apprehension and fit *before* Sargon even has his prophetic dream. Unlike Sargon, Joseph was not at all disturbed by the prospect of dominating his brothers and parents. Whether due to youthful arrogance or confidence in the destiny god has assigned to him, his matter-of-factness here makes him a not entirely sympathetic figure.

Like Sargon's dream, the dreams of Joseph belong to Oppenheim's category of the symbolic dream:

a series of more-or-less rational activities, actions, and gestures are performed for the benefit of the dreamer, as a rule silently and with gods, stars, animals, and objects of every description as actors.⁵

As we know from Joseph's later career in Egypt, such dreams usually require interpretation. Even the very obvious dream of Gudea, ordering him to build the temple of Ningirsu,⁶ required an elaborate interpretation. But, continues Oppenheim,

There are, however, a few instances of "symbolic" dreams in which interpretations can be dispensed with. Such are the self-explanatory dreams of Joseph foretelling his future supremacy over his family.

Such, too, is the dream of Sargon. The action of the goddess and what it prophesies is clear both to Sargon and Urzababa, despite the latter's desperate and insincere attempt at reinterpretation. Had there been any real doubt, Urzababa could have turned to a professional interpreter, or to the goddess herself.⁷

The appearance of the goddess Inana in Sargon's dream guaranteed its authenticity. Joseph's dreams contained no such theophany, and the questioning of both his brothers and father suggest that neither entirely believed that the message was authentic. As Von Rad has noted,⁸ this lack of divine presence makes Joseph's dreams ambiguous: do they represent the hubris of a brash young man, or genuine prophecies of future greatness? Whichever, the increased hatred of his brothers, and his father's thoughtfulness, are appropriate responses. One might compare Jacob's

⁵ Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, N.S. 46/3 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956) 206.

⁶ Oppenheim, *Dreams*, 211f. Gudea's dream begins very much like Sargon's; see *JAOS* 103 (1983) 80.

⁷ Cf. Oppenheim, *Dreams*, 221.

⁸ *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 346.

believable mixture of annoyance and thoughtfulness to Urzababa's desperate distortion of the dream's message. The former then unwittingly sent Joseph into his brothers' trap, whereas Urzababa deliberately sent Sargon into an unsuccessful trap. Inana protected Sargon from Urzababa, but Joseph's salvation was more circuitous: he succumbed to his brothers, but his sale into Egyptian bondage turned out to be a part of a divine scheme that ultimately saved his father and the very brothers who tried to do him in.

The folkloric character of the Joseph story has long been recognized.⁹ Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*¹⁰ lists the following relevant motifs: Dream of future greatness for youth (M312.0.1), dream (prophecy) of future greatness causes punishment (imprisonment) (L425), and vain attempts to escape fulfillment of prophecy, of which there are many subtypes (expulsion, confinement, killing; M370ff.). In Aarne-Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale*,¹¹ two types bear resemblance to the Joseph story. In No. 517, a boy understands the language of the birds, who prophesy that his parents will humble themselves before him. The parents drive him away in anger, and the boy becomes a great man, returns unknown to his parents, and the prophecy is fulfilled. In No. 725, a boy dreams that his parents and the king shall serve him. He is driven away, but after many adventures, his dream comes true. These tale-types and motifs¹² are found world-wide; one of the most striking parallels is from pre-Columbian Peru:¹³

Two brothers, jealous of a third brother's superhuman powers, lured him into a cave where they sealed him up. After some time, when the brothers were certain that the third brother was dead, he appeared to them "flying through the air on great wings of colored feathers, and with the fear the sight of him aroused in them, they tried to run away. But he quickly dispelled that fear, saying: 'Do not be afraid or troubled; I come only that the empire of the Incas shall begin to be known. Therefore leave, leave this settlement which you have built, and go farther down until you come to a valley where you will then found Cuzco.'"

⁹ See especially Gaster(-Frazer), *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975 [1969]), 216f., and Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, VT Sup 20 (1970), chaps. 4 and 7.

¹⁰ Bloomington: Indiana University, 1955-58.

¹¹ Folklore Fellows Communications, No. 184 (1964).

¹² For a critical discussion of the tale-type and motif as analytical units, see Dundes, *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, Studies in Folklore, No. 2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 62ff.

¹³ Pedro de Cieza de Leon, *The Incas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1959) 32ff.; cited by Gaster, *Myth*, 216f.

Neither the Joseph story nor the story of Sargon's rise to power are folktales. The Joseph story is the culmination of the patriarchal narrative that brings the family of Jacob into Egypt, setting the stage for the charter myth of the nation of Israel as recounted in Exodus. The Sargon text, whose introduction depicts a prosperous Kish ruled by Urzababa, is part of a group of Sumerian "historical-literary" compositions that relate the rise and fall of every major Mesopotamian hegemony prior to the Old Babylonian period.¹⁴ In both texts, "motifs from folk literature" are being used as "building stones" in literary compositions.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the motifs and tale-types mentioned above bear a much closer resemblance to Joseph than to Sargon. The transformations involved are obvious: son/junior sibling (subordinate to parents and brothers) > courtier (subordinate to king); dream that superiors (parents and brothers) will serve him > dream that superior (king) will be killed and he will replace him. The functions remain essentially identical, yet it is the Joseph story which finds so many parallels in its specifics. I have not found any precise parallel to the Sargon story, in which a courtier dreams of replacing the king.¹⁶

The reason for this is to be sought in the natures of Mesopotamian and Israelite literature. In an article entitled "How Old are Folktales?,"¹⁷ Jason and Kempinski note that since

no people on Earth has been found to lack oral tradition, the assumption is that oral tradition did exist in the same measure among all the ancient people too. From this oral tradition the folk literature was committed to writing according to the scribal tradition specific to each culture.

Nevertheless, the folk materials preserved in Mesopotamian literature are "very few," but "much richer" in the OT. This is because Mesopotamia had a millennia-long tradition of scribal literacy, for which "the popular story in the vernacular was something so entirely different that only rarely did it attract the attention of the scribe-literatus," whereas

Israelite scribal tradition was young at the time when it produced its great works. . . . As the Israelite scribes had no impressive written tradition to build upon, they turned to folk tradition.

This, then, accounts for the closer resemblance between the Joseph story and the materials in the corpora represented in the motif and tale-type indices.

¹⁴ Cooper and Heimpel, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 73f.

¹⁵ Jason, *Folklore and Oral Communication* 1980, 170.

¹⁶ But cf. the King of Heaven replaced by his butler/cupbearer in the Hittite Kumarbi myth (*ANET*, 120).

¹⁷ *Fabula* 22 (1981) 1ff.

Sargon and Joseph both dreamed of surpassing their superiors, and both survived attempts to prevent their prophetic dreams from becoming reality. Can we postulate some sort of genetic relationship between the two stories? It is not my intention to add to the long list of alleged Mesopotamian materials in Genesis. Not only are the actors in the two stories different, but the stories have no specific details in common. Thus, there can be no question of Babylonian influence here, as there most certainly is in the Noah story (this may well be the only certain instance of the influence of a Mesopotamian literary work on the OT).¹⁸ Perhaps the stories have some remote common ancestor, but the universality of the motifs they have in common suggests that this need not be so. No one would suggest that there is any genetic relationship between the Joseph story and the Incan legend of the founding of Cuzco cited above. In his *Morphology of the Folktale* Propp asks: "How is one to explain the similarity of the tale . . . when the contact of peoples cannot be proven historically?"¹⁹ A simple yet adequate answer, consonant with the mentalist premises of recent linguistics, was provided by Stith Thompson: "The very nature of human thought has undoubtedly produced many natural parallels."²⁰ He goes on to add that "there has also been a great deal of diffusion." And here is the difficulty in attempting to understand the relationship between the Sargon and Joseph stories. When the materials are not so close that a genetic relationship is obvious, yet the cultures are not so distant that some kind of genetic relationship can be categorically denied, it is often impossible reach any conclusion at all.²¹

Then why bother to write about such resemblances? I believe it is important to recognize the folkloric "building stones" in ancient Near Eastern literature in order to comprehend the architecture that employed them and reconstruct and appreciate the edifices of which they are a part. Jason is correct when she writes that "a thorough examination [of a text] with the aid of ethnopoetic tools . . . can help solve philological text-critical problems otherwise unsolvable."²² The story of Sargon's rise to power is a very difficult text, and it was the recognition of the folkloric motifs in it that provided one of the bases of a confident interpretation, even though many of the details remain murky. The recognition of these motifs and tale-types in Mesopotamian "historical-literary" compo-

sitions²³—and in the Bible—provides yet one more argument for studying these documents primarily as works of literature, and not as records of past events that can be sieved for historical kernels.

²³ Cf. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, chap. 2.

¹⁸ But note the reservations of Irvin, *Mytharion*, (AOAT 32; Kevelaer: Butzon und Bercker, 1978), 113.

¹⁹ P. 16 of the second English edition (Austin: University of Texas, 1968).

²⁰ *Narrative Motif-Analysis as a Folklore Method*, Folklore Fellows Communications, No. 161 (1955) 4.

²¹ Cf. the discussion of Irvin, *Mytharion*, 114.

²² *Folklore and Oral Communication* 1981, 173.

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